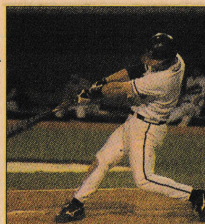




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THE DIAMONDBACK

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND'S INDEPENDENT STUDENT NEWSPAPER

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“Who are we that we shouldn’t fight to extend the protections of academic freedom?”



—Mark Leone
ANTHROPOLOGY
PROFESSOR

Redefining the bounds of academic freedom for university affiliates

BY HEATHER KEELS
Senior staff writer

Physics Today editor Jeff Schmidt considered himself an affiliate of the university — he carried a university ID card, used the university libraries and worked down the street at the American Center for Physics in College Park.

So when he was fired from his job in May 2000 after writing a controversial book and embarrassing his employers with his workplace activism, Schmidt turned to the university for protection from what he considered a breach of his academic freedom.

However, the issue finally came before the university’s Senate Executive Committee April 8 Schmidt and many of his supporters felt the committee had turned its back on a chance to expand academic freedom, redress an injustice and, at the very least, clarify the univer-

sity’s position on its affiliates’ rights.

Two university professors, Joe Auslander and Mark Leone, suggested the Senate Campus Affairs Committee work out a clear, official definition of which freedoms are implied by affiliate status, such as the relationship between the university and the American Institute of Physics, where Schmidt worked.

But after much discussion, the executive committee decided not to send the issue to the Campus Affairs Committee because several committee members believed such affiliations were so broad and diverse that uniform guidelines would be impractical.

“What they did was, in my estimation, administratively shortsighted,” said Leone, an anthropology professor and former senate chair, after the meeting.

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Schmidt could recover univ. job

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“Now there’s no way that we’ll ever understand how broad or narrow academic freedom exists beyond the bounds of Route 1,” he said.

The executive committee’s discussion centered around the various types of university affiliations. The relationship with the American Institute of Physics is unique, Ann Wylie, university President Dan Mote’s chief of staff, said at the meeting. The university grants AIP members use of its libraries, child care services and recreation center in exchange for the physics department’s use of AIP’s facilities.

Executive committee member Mike Brown pointed out that the university has a range of formal and

informal relationships, including one with an institution that does classified work, where it would be inappropriate for everyone involved to have the same freedom as university professors.

“There’s no reason that this should be our issue,” Brown said. “Not everybody who has a relationship with the campus that’s formal can have the same freedoms.”

“I don’t know that we could ask a committee to write up a set of guidelines for any relationship in the abstract,” committee member Charles Wellford said.

But Auslander said he felt there were precedents for the university protecting freedoms in far more

vague relationships. For example, the university has guidelines through the Fair Labor Association that protect the rights of workers in companies that make T-shirts and other trinkets with the university logo.

This document includes protection of employee activism, which Schmidt said was part of why he was fired. The official reason given by the American Institute of Physics was that Schmidt worked on a book he was writing during company time.

But a report by the Human Rights Committee of the Plasma Science and Applications Committee and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers states it is more likely Schmidt was fired for the views expressed in his book, *Disciplined Minds*. The book argues that

professionals are restricted by the political ideologies of their employers. The committee also believes AIP subjected Schmidt to a “smear campaign” after he embarrassed the company by his attempts to bring more diversity to the *Physics Today* staff.

Schmidt, who is still without a job after nearly four years, said while no decision from the Senate Campus Affairs Committee could recover his job, acknowledging the offense and restoring his library privileges would be a form of punitive justice.

“If everyone were assured of their freedom of expression, then we would have a lot more personal power and a lot more corrupt practices within corporations could be brought to an end,” he said. “People shouldn’t have to risk their jobs to speak out,” he said.